

Reporter Recounts Airstrip Slaughter

By RON JAVERS
San Francisco Chronicle

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Jones-town is every evil thing that everybody thought — and worse.

We knew that before the shooting started.

The slaughter began at 4:20 p.m. Saturday (Guyana time) while we were standing beside the twin-engine airplane that had brought us to Port Kaituma on Friday and had returned to pick us up.

I was waiting between Bob Brown and Don Harris, the two NBC men who were killed. We had become close friends during the course of our ordeal.

The firing erupted from guns close by. I was hit first. I was knocked to the ground by a slug in the left shoulder, apparently from a 38-caliber weapon.

I crawled behind the right wheel of the plane.

Bob Brown stayed on his feet and kept filming what was happening, even as the attackers advanced on him with their guns.

He was incredibly tenacious.

While I was trying to decide whether to stay where I was or risk the 100-yard-dash across the close-cropped grass field to the jungle, I saw Brown go down.

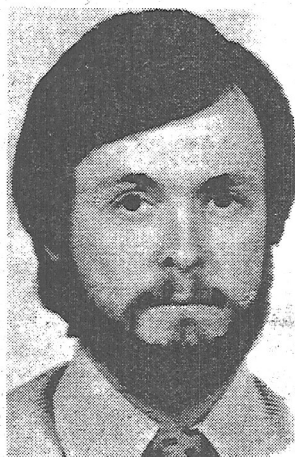
Then I saw one of the attackers stick a shotgun right into Brown's face, inches away, if that.

Bob's brain was blown out of his head. It splattered the blue NBC minicam.

I'll never forget that sight as long as I live.

I ran, and then I dived head-first into the brush.

I got up and scrambled as far into the



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swamp as I could. I was about 150 yards from the airstrip and up to my waist in water.

I pushed through the rain forest, walking parallel to the runway, trying to figure out what had happened.

I couldn't see much. I had lost both pairs of glasses I had with me.

But there was silence. Apparently the party of attackers which must have included four, five or six men with guns, had fled.

I was far down the field by the time I returned to the airstrip.

And then, like the other survivors, I returned to the crippled plane.

Leo Ryan was on his back in a blue cord

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suit, lying in the mud in front of the right wheel of the aircraft.

His face had been shot off.

Don Harris lay alongside the middle of the plane.

Brown was at the tail of the 18-passenger Otter.

Greg Robinson, the San Francisco Examiner photographer at the scene, was at the left wheel, his body crumbled almost in half.

There were four Guyanese soldiers at the far end of the field.

They told us they had not been able to hoot at the attackers during the assault because they were afraid they would kill till more people.

The only policeman at the field, carry-

ing a single-shell shotgun, had been disarmed the moment the men from the People's Temple began firing from their truck and trailer while we were getting ready to board the two planes; our own craft and the smaller one that was set to carry away the fugitives from Jonestown.

We took our most seriously wounded to the soldiers' tent and then we retired into Port Kaituma, the settlement next to the airstrip.

The local Guyanese knew they were risking their own safety by letting us stay, but they were extremely kind to us.

We stood watches during the stormy night — taking turns standing guard in pairs outside the police hut where our wounded were lying.

When we first reached Jonestown, on Friday night, the atmosphere was lively and cordial. We found ourselves getting a real Cook's Tour, with everything arranged for us. There was great rock music from the Jonestown band and entertainment during dinner.

But before we left for an evening's drive through foot-deep mud to Port Kaituma, a young man slipped Don Harris of NBC a message written on a child's slate, saying, "Please help me get out of Jonestown."

It had four signatures.

Back in Port Kaituma, where the entire group of us spent Friday night in a tin-roofed disco — a small beer parlor with a phonograph and a few records — local Guyanese began telling us horror stories.

They told us about one man who had escaped from the colony last summer, only

to be captured by guards from Jonestown and then beaten.

When we returned the following morning to Jonestown, we were not surprised to see Rev. Jim Jones' carefully stage-managed production start to crack.

Edith Parker, one of the 1,200 followers trapped in Jonestown, approached Ryan and said she wanted to leave with him.

Finally, about 20 got up their courage to defy Jones.

There were too many of us for one truckload. The reporters and cameramen were told we would go out in the first batch, but Ryan would wait to leave in the second.

Suddenly, there was a commotion in the central building that serves as the colony's meeting place — a large structure with a tin roof and packed dirt floor.

A cheer rang through the crowd.

Then, a young white man made a direct lunge at Ryan with a knife.

The blade was at Ryan's throat when Mark Lane and Charles Garry, Jones' lawyers and long-time supporters, grabbed the weapon.

The attacker was cut before he could be disarmed.

And Ryan's shirt was drenched with the attacker's blood.

Ryan ran to the truck at that point and we lumbered off through the mud to the airstrip.

Shaken by what he thought was his successful narrow escape, Ryan told us as we reached the airstrip, "I wouldn't be alive if it was not for Mark Lane."

Ryan lived only a few minutes longer.

HW: CA had no sidebar story today about Memphian Mark Lane. But NBC channel had interview w/ Barb. Pickerell (sp?), Lane associate here. Lane then unaccounted for. Barb's face not shown: cloak & dagger.